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April 27, 2011

### THIS WEEK: "A Trip to Des Moines in 1860"

**BACKGROUND:** The Fourth reunion of the **Pioneer Lawmakers Association** assembled in the auditorium of the Young Men's Christian Association Building at Des Moines, on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of February, 1894, at 9 a.m., and were called to order by Hon. George G. Wright, President.

**Julius H. Powers** served as a senator during the Eighth Iowa General Assembly in 1860. He served for Senate District 40, which comprised Chickasaw, Howard, Mitchell, Winnebago, Hancock, Floyd, Worth, Cerro Gordo, and Wright counties. At that time, Powers was a 29-year-old lawyer.

### A Trip to Des Moines in 1860

(The following address was delivered during the reunion by Hon. J.H. Powers)

Rushing into the city by the first train, having taken the sleeper at "That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane."

I found myself in Des Moines in time for breakfast, and ere the duties of the day called for care, was ready for the labors of the hour.



**Honorable J.H. Powers**

The contrast of this, with a journey from the same place to the capitol in 1860, makes the tales of the Arabian Nights fade into common-place every day occurrences, and the wonders of boyhood's imagination more than equalled by passing events.

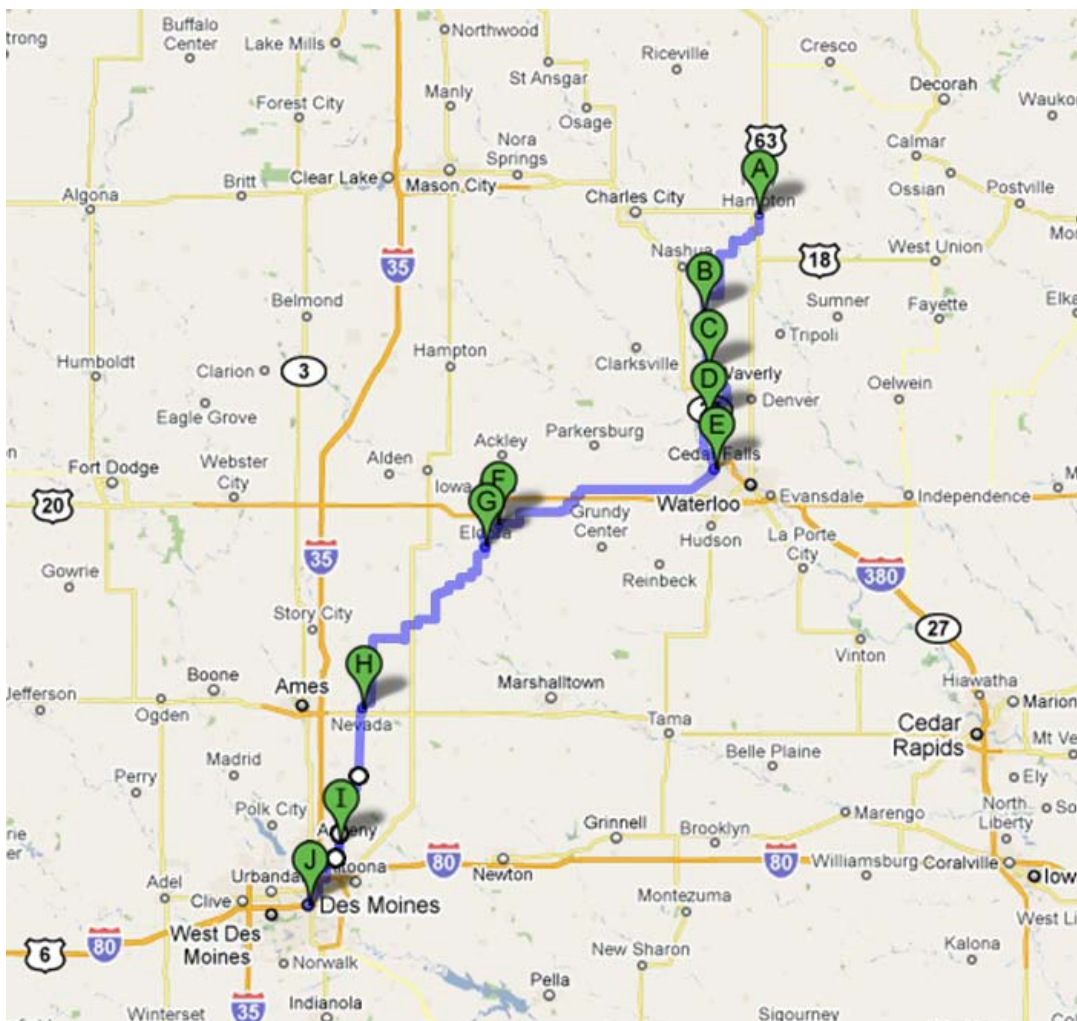
Without public conveyance to my home in Chickasaw, to Des Moines, only by stage to McGregor, thence via. Chicago to a point at the terminus of the railroad west of Davenport, thence by stage to the law-making city, it appeared to be too much of a swing around the circle to be inviting, and it was decided that we take private conveyance across the State.

Having married a young wife, after my nomination to the senate, and, as it did not seem fitting to leave her on the bleak prairies in the north part of the State, provision had been made for the transportation of more than one, and as there was but one covered carriage in the county, and I had hired that to bring my new wife to her new home, and as it would carry only two persons

without baggage, other means than riding in style of a wedding trip had to be provided.

In the emergency Wm. Tucker, since a member of the house of representatives, consented to take his democrat wagon and convey us to the scene of my new duties.

We started from New Hampton on the last day of the year 1859, with the mercury 26 degrees below zero. We made the first ten miles to Chickasaw and stopped to warm and get dinner. About four o'clock we started for Waverly, and on reaching Horton, fifteen miles, we were obliged to stop to warm. Having warmed and eaten supper we rode to Waverly, reaching there about nine o'clock. Stopping at the first hotel we came to, we took up



**The route taken by the Honorable J.H. Powers from New Hampton to Des Moines in 1860.**

quarters for the night. On the morning of the first day of January, 1860, the mercury in the thermometer was congealed, and the shell of the house

where we stopped, was feeble protection from the cold, and I started across the pond on the ice. There was a little strip of my face exposed, and when I brought up at the hotel, found there was a line of white marking the place of exposure, but it was soon thawed by an application of snow. In the evening we started for Cedar Falls, but so intense was the cold that when we reached Janesville we stopped to warm, reaching Cedar Falls about ten o'clock and found the hotel full, but warm. The next morning was stormy and blustering, but it had warmed up so that the thermometer only marked 26 below zero. Here our party increased by the addition of Zimri Streeter, the representative from Black Hawk county, and known as "Old Black Hawk," Senator Brown, Editor Smead and several others.

We started to cross Grundy county to Steamboat Rock, distant twenty-six miles without an intervening house. It snowed all day and progress was slow, and as the cold increased I felt uneasy about the safety of my wife, as she was suffering intensely. A little after dark she was disposed to be quiet, and said she was not as cold as she had been. Knowing too well what this meant, I wrapped her with all the robes and commenced rubbing and shaking her, and on reaching a little sod house about five miles from Steamboat Rock, we stopped to warm, and then it was clear that my wife had barely escaped freezing. The balance of the company went on and had fires built and supper ready when we arrived. In preparing supper the landlady had used all their supply of flour. When we came to retire we were placed in an icy cold room, and on opening the bed we found that one of the sheets was a linen table cloth. It may seem jolly to recall this incident, but to go to a cold room after having been in the cold all day, with the thermometer 40 below zero and try to warm up a linen table cloth used as the upper sheet, was no laughing matter.

As we had exhausted the hotel's supplies for supper we were obliged to go to Eldora for breakfast. The next morning my wife learned a lesson that may well be heeded by weary travelers, for going through the hotel kitchen the appearance was such that it destroyed her appetite for breakfast. Another day of weary travel and cold brought us to Nevada, Story county, where we passed a comfortable night. Starting the next morning with the prospect of reaching our destination that evening, and having our company increased by the addition of several teams carrying members and senators, we were in good spirits. About sundown we began to feel uneasy, as we saw no symptoms of the town, and seeing smoke in the distance we turned our teams to the little house on the prairie and on reaching it found that we had taken the wrong road and were then eleven miles from Des Moines.

It was now growing dark and we were assured by the owner that we could not stay all night. At this "Old Blackhawk" jumped out and told us to unload, as there was plenty of room for both man and beast. The cattle were turned out of the straw barns and the horses put in and we took down the beds so as to make room for all to get into the house. In a short time another lost

load came up and "Old Blackhawk" told them to put out their horses and come in as there was plenty of room. The robes and blankets were laid in the shed and myself and wife were thus provided with sleeping apartments while the balance of the guests improved their time in baking biscuits. We reached Des Moines the next day about 11 o'clock and stopped at the Grout House on the east side at the foot of capitol hill.

At the extra session I came down on horseback in five days, sleeping one night on the prairie, having been lost.

As scarcely a hamlet in the State is more than twenty-four hours distant from the capitol, at the present time, and as we old pioneers see and feel the progress of the last third of a century, we look back upon those early privations and hardships and gloat over the fact that we were present at the laying of the foundation.